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DAY *and* NIGHT



# DAY and NIGHT

*Poems by Dorothy Livesay*



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To

ALAN AND JEAN CRAWLEY

*(gardeners)*



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# DAY and NIGHT.

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## *SEVEN POEMS*

### I

A SHELL burst in my mind  
Upheaving roots since birth, perhaps, confined  
Before I dreamed  
The devastation there outlined.

And so my body now  
Owes no allegiance to the scythe and plough:  
I, dispossessed  
Count no blossoms on the bough.

I build on no man's land  
A city not my own, with others planned  
By others dreamed,  
And with a new race forged and manned!

*Seven Poems*

II

From the husk of the old world  
To the new I fly  
Strong wings beating  
In a bluer sky

Where old men stretch not  
Their vampire necks  
And young men vaunt not  
Their sunburnt backs

Where jewelled women  
With glittering breasts  
Suck not the life-blood  
From young nests

But where the cradled  
Infant rocks  
While cloudy sheep  
Caress his locks

And where the golden  
Apples blow  
In easy bliss  
Upon a bough.

III

Out of the turmoil mustered up by day  
We may not free our hands, nor turn our heads to pray—  
So tight the knot our sunlight ties.

*Seven Poems*

So firm the hold of voices, thoughts are drowned  
The river's chant is lost, in splintering gunshot sound:  
Or from its song the essence dies.

Brightness was all, when earth lay primitive  
Fair to the hands' fresh touch, ready to burst and live:  
Now in her womb corrosion lies.

Therefore we search alone the shuttered dark  
Where faces of the dead shine luminous, a spark  
Of lightning from encircled skies:

Therefore we seek the peace of broken ground  
After the wars have buried all the young, and found  
Dark remedy for shining eyes . . .

Therefore we hide our faces; make no sound.

IV

On a night like this, the Ides of March perhaps,  
Spring will arrest your muscles and a raid  
Of hands will light on you, and cry out: "Choose."  
Incisive fingers on your shoulder-blade,  
Open sockets for stampeding news.

"Listen child." And you know the answer held  
You face the pitiless eyes and open wide  
Your own, like shock observers; as they say  
The words no fluttering flag of fear could hide:  
"The operation failed. He died today."

### *Seven Poems*

And if the words were different: "War's declared."  
There is no difference, the thought is one.  
This the expected shock, the Judas-kiss  
A flower cup uncurling into sun  
Childhood's leaves warned by the dark of this.

We grew, and munitions matched us, laboratories  
Weighed the ingredients; magnifying glass  
Revealed death's desert in a finger-nail  
Of dust. Whatever door we sought to pass  
Was marked with chalk. All sesames would fail.

This is not news, but a resolution passed  
After hard labor, bitterness of sides.  
Tension relaxed, you knew it all your days:  
There would be one man missing, one who hides  
His cunning hand from thunder with the "nays."

Impartially the chairman-undertaker  
Smiling casts his vote, announces death  
Speculates on population where  
Our wombs are lacerated, lovers' breath  
Is torn asunder in the cool March air.

We are the children long prepared for dust  
Ready in bone, the wrist a pulsing pain:  
On a precarious railway-rib we lie  
Our limbs long ready for the armored train—  
Ears to the ground and bare eyes to the sky.

*Seven Poems*

V

The fallow mind in winter knows, its scope  
And wide horizon are made narrow by  
The rim of early dusk, descending blinds—  
Last summer's rocket buried under sand.  
To soar and spin, to take the hand and whip  
A leash of fiery comets through the sky:  
To be crier or prophet, John or Isaiah, these  
Wait in the mind for the world's turning phase:  
The time she lifts her head from blood-soaked fields,  
From one-eyed houses, shattered, gaping towns,  
The time she sees her brother sun, and bares  
Her ribs to his remembered healing blaze—  
Then will the mind take a new stature on  
And children thrive, who late last year were bombed.

VI

The child looks out from doors too high and wide for him  
On words spun large as suns, huge meanings sprayed on  
tree  
And roadway, spreading fields, not to be caught and  
clapped  
Together in a rosy nave, the sun no coin  
For fingers to indent.

The child runs out to stare  
At masterful young men who bat a tennis ball  
At giants in kilt skirts whose march is purposeful  
At mothers in cool gowns who move about like moons  
Upon the eternal lawns, low laughter shimmering  
About their curving mouths.

*Seven Poems*

The child leans on the future,  
Slender tree ungainly rooted there by private worlds  
Who knew a private ecstasy unshared by him  
But let the memory slip and reared a hedge  
Of bristling phrases, last year's bills, and week-ends  
snatched  
In secret hate; his room laid waste when radios  
Are tuned, when rumor's blatant voice hits nerve,  
Dries tissue, brittles down  
The new unmolded bone.

The child in cities toddling up  
A stifling reach of stair, gains window-seat:  
How consternation puckers up his eyes—at space  
Unplanted, seed unwanted, wars unwarranted  
Consuming his small, thankless growing place!

VII

And life goes on. And here  
We hold a leaf upon the eyes  
And its green ribs press down like veins  
Into the nerve and sinew of ourselves.  
Your finger-tip on eyelid, or my brows  
Bent in the conclave of your cheek,  
Spurs vibrant nerve to life, adheres like leaf to stem  
Stem into tree, tree rooted into earth.

No hazard here, for we  
Like sleepers plunging deep  
Into recurring waves of dream  
Cannot awake from that connected bliss.  
We are asleep on the long-limb of time.

*1934-1940.*

## *THE OUTRIDER*

"Swift outrider of lumbering earth."

—C. DAY LEWIS

*For Raymond Knister*

### PROLOGUE

HE WHO was alien has retraced the road  
Unleashed, returns to this familiar earth.  
The gate falls open at his touch, the house  
Receives him without wonder, as an elm  
Accepts her brood of birds. Along his road  
Crows' charivari chattering announce  
His coming to each thronging sentry-post.

The old man standing with his hayfork high  
Can let it rest, mid-air, and burden fails  
And falls within the sun-dipped gloom of barn.  
The young boy bowed behind the clicking mow  
Feels his spine stiffen as if birds had whirred  
Behind him, or a storm had clapped its clouds.  
A girl, chin pressed upon a broom, will stir  
As a warm wave of wonder sweeps her out  
Whither her musings never leapt before.  
And so it is.

His coming dreamed of long  
In the recesses of thinking, in the hard  
Hills climbed, his face a resting-place.  
In winter warming hands at roaring stove  
His doings slumbering as autumn wood . . .  
And so it is. Now summer's all swept clean  
He comes with eyes more piercing than before  
And scrapes his boots—swinging wide the door.

*The Outrider*

I

The year we came, it was all stone picking:  
Sun on your fiery back, and the earth  
Grimly hanging on to her own. At the farm's end  
A cedar bog to clear. But in the dry season  
Not enough drink for the cattle.  
The children gathered blueberries, and ate corn meal.  
We danced no festivals.

Children stretched lean to manhood. One day  
Wind prying round, wrenched free the barn  
And lightning had the whole hay crop  
Flaming to heaven. Trying to save the horse  
Arthur was stifled. His black bones  
We buried under the elm.

I stumble around now, trying to see it clearly.  
Incessantly driven to feed our own ones, but friendly  
to neighbors:  
Not like the crows, hungry for goslings,  
But sober, sitting down Sunday for rest-time  
Contented with laughter.

I stumble around now, lame old farm dog:  
When I'm gone, one less hunger  
And the hay still to be mown.

*The Outrider*

The buggy on that whirling autumn day  
Swayed in a rain rut, nearly overturned.  
And you stood by the roadside, brown and gay,  
Black hair drawn tight in pigtails and your eyes  
Searching the sky. Brave was your body then  
And I brought you home to discover the answer to  
hunger,  
The peace of loving, the stay to restlessness.

Trembling as a birch tree to a boy's swinging  
You were again and again my own small love.  
But love was never enough, though children sprang  
Year after year from your loins—never enough  
For my yearning though your eyes burned strangely—  
And earth has kept you far more fierce and safe.

My mother caught me in her skirts and tossed me high  
High into hay I bounced.  
The straw tickled and a swallow, frightened, flew  
Before my heart could cry.

I remember this, the startling day of early fear,  
Bird beating me back  
And somehow no way—hard to know why or where  
she was no longer near.

Brothers would later tease me with a feather tail  
or loose a crow they caught  
And I must swallow the fear with my hunger, to learn  
how the yearned for will fail

*The Outrider*

How the expected sunlight will shrivel your pounding  
heart,  
the seed you plant be killed  
The apple be bitter with worm, but your honesty firm  
seeking another start.

. . . . .  
I grew up one evening, much alone—  
Resolved to plunge. The thing I feared, the crow,  
Was hoarse with calling, whirling, diving down  
And suddenly his urgent social bent  
Was answer to my inwardness. His cry  
Throbbed and echoed in my head, his wings  
Caught all reflections in my mirrored mind.  
I would then follow where his footless tread  
Led on; I would no longer be the beast  
Who ploughed a straight line to the barrier  
And swung back on his steps—my father's son.  
It would take long. But from that summer on  
My heart was set. I raced through swinging air,  
Rumpled my head with laughter in the clouds.

II

It was different, different  
From the thoughts I had.  
Asphalt and factory walls are not  
Soft ending to a road.

It was different, different  
Standing tight in line  
Forgetting buffeting clouds above  
Trying to look a man.

*The Outrider*

It was different, different  
To lift the lever arm  
And see farm beasts revolving by  
Their dripping blood still warm.

On lazier afternoons  
Deep in clover scent  
*Neither beast nor I could dream*  
What the speed-up meant.

A thousand men go home  
And I a thousandth part  
Wedged in a work more sinister  
Than hitching horse and cart.

Dark because you're beaten  
By a boss's mind:  
A single move uneven turned  
Will set you in the wind.

His mercy is a calculation  
Worse than a hurricane—  
Weather you can grumble at  
But men can make you groan.

(Down in the washroom  
leaflets are passed.  
“Say, Joe, you sure  
got those out fast.”

*The Outrider*

"Yes. Now's the time  
to give them the gate:  
Speed-up right here  
is legitimate!"

An old worker stares:  
his wizened face  
Sceptical still—  
Years in the trace.

But young, lean face  
opposite me  
Reads, and alert  
watches to see

Who will respond  
who's first to talk—  
Our eyes meet, and greet  
as a key fits a lock.)

Early morning  
stirs the street  
men go by  
on urgent feet.

Early morning  
litter still  
in the gutters  
on the sill.

Early morning  
sky shows blue  
men are marching  
two and two.

*The Outrider*

Men are surging  
past the gate  
where last week no one  
dared be late:

Surging—though  
a siren's shrieks  
warn that someone  
called the dicks . . .

It was different, different  
Because I learned: for this  
You plough the fields and scatter  
The toil of days and years.

You die in harness and are proud  
Of earthen servitude  
While others that live in chains have sought  
To shake the rotting wood

Upheave the very earth, if need  
Insist, banish the fence  
Between a neighbor's grudging hate  
Rise in our own defence

Against the smooth-tongued salesman  
“The cottage built for two”  
The haggling on market days  
Desperate to know

*The Outrider*

How winter's service shall be slaved—  
Will this hay last the year—  
Where are the taxes coming from—  
Must we sell the mare?

Cities that sell their toil, must put  
Possessiveness to shame  
And draw you to them in the fight:  
The battle is the same.

The blowing silver barley grain  
And skyline wide, serene—  
These shall be your gift to those  
Who wield the world's machine!

III

This is your signpost: follow your hands, and dig.  
After, the many will have parachutes  
For air delight. Not veering with the crow  
But throbbing, conscious, knowing where to go.  
There's time for flying. Dig up crumbling roots,  
Eradicate the underbrush and twig—  
Pull snapping thistle out and stubborn sloe—  
Those backward ramblers who insist they know.

Employ your summertime, at union rate:  
Conveying energy on this green belt  
Of earth assembled, swiftly known and felt.  
Faster! Speed-up is here legitimate:  
Employ your summertime, before the thrust  
Of winter wind would harden down the dust.

*The Outrider*

EPILOGUE

We prayed for miracles: the prairie dry,  
Our bread became a blister in the sun;  
We watched the serene untoachable vault of sky  
—In vain our bitter labor had been done.

We prayed to see the racing clouds at bay  
Rumpled like sheets after a night of joy,  
To stand quite still and let the deluged day  
Of rain's releasing, surge up and destroy.

We prayed for miracles, and had no wands  
Nor wits about us; strained in a pointed prayer  
We were so many windmills without hands  
To whirl and drag the water up to air.

A runner sent ahead, returned with news:  
"There is no milk nor honey flowing there.  
Others allay the thirst with their own blood  
Cool with their sweat, and fertilize despair."

O new found land! Sudden release of lungs,  
Our own breath blows the world! Our veins, unbound  
Set free the fighting heart. We speak with tongues—  
This struggle is our miracle new found.

1935.

## *DAY AND NIGHT*

### I

DAWN, red and angry, whistled loud and sends  
A geysered shaft of steam searching the air.  
Scream after scream announces that the churn  
Of life must move, the giant arm command.  
Men in a stream, a moving human belt  
Move into sockets, every one a bolt.  
The fun begins, a humming whirring drum—  
Men do a dance in time to the machines.

One step forward  
Two steps back  
Shove the lever,  
Push it back

/ While Arnot whirls  
A roundabout  
And Geoghan shuffles  
Bolts about

One step forward  
Hear it crack  
Smashing rhythm—  
Two steps back

Your heart-beat pounds  
Against your throat  
The roaring voices  
Drown your shout

*Day and Night*

Across the way  
A writhing whack  
Sets you spinning  
Two steps back—

One step forward  
Two steps back.

II

Day and night are rising and falling  
Night and day shift gears and slip rattling  
Down the runway, shot into storerooms  
Where only arms and a note-book remember  
The record of evil, the sum of commitments.  
We move as through sleep's revolving memories  
Piling up hatred, stealing the remnants  
*Doors forever folding before us—*  
And where is the recompense, on what agenda  
Will you set love down? Who knows of peace?

Day and night  
Night and day  
Light rips into ribbons  
What we say

I called to love  
Deep in dream:  
Be with me in the daylight  
As in gloom.

*Day and Night*

Be with me in the pounding  
In the knives against my back  
Set your voice resounding  
Above the steel's whip crack.

High and sweet  
Sweet and high  
Hold, hold up the sunlight  
In the sky!  
Day and night  
Night and day  
Tear up all the silence  
Find the words I could not say . . .

III

We were stoking coal in the furnaces; red hot  
They gleamed, burning our skins away, his and mine.  
We were working together, night and day, and knew  
Each other's stroke; and without words exchanged  
An understanding about kids at home,  
The landlord's jaw, wage-cuts and overtime.

We were like buddies, see? Until they said  
That nigger is too smart the way he smiles  
And saucers back the foreman; he might say  
Too much one day, to others changing shifts.  
Therefore they cut him down, who flowered at night  
And raised me up, day hanging over night—  
So furnaces could still consume our withered skin.

*Day and Night*

Shadrach, Mechak and Abednego  
Turn in the furnace, whirling slow.

Lord, I'm burnin' in the fire  
Lord, I'm steppin' on the coal  
Lord, I'm blacker than my brother  
Blow your breath down here.

Boss, I'm smothered in the darkness  
Boss, I'm shrivellin' in the flames  
Boss, I'm blacker than my brother  
Blow your breath down here.

Shadrach, Mechak and Abednego  
Burn in the furnace, whirling slow.

IV

Up in the roller room, men swing steel  
Swing it, zoom; and cut it, crash.  
Up in the dark the welder's torch  
Makes sparks fly like lightning's reel.

Now I remember storm on a field  
The trees bow tense before the blow  
Even the jittering sparrow's talk  
Ripples into the still tree shield.

*Day and Night*

We are in storm that has no cease  
No lull before, no after time  
When green with rain the grasses grow  
And air is sweet with fresh increase.

We bear the burden home to bed  
The furnace glows within our hearts:  
Our bodies hammered through the night  
Are welded into bitter bread.

Bitter, yes:  
But listen, friend  
We are mightier  
In the end

We have ears  
Alert to seize  
A weakness  
In the foreman's ease

We have eyes  
To look across  
The bosses' profit  
At our loss.

Are you waiting?  
Wait with us  
After evening  
There's a hush

*Day and Night*

Use it not  
For love's slow count:  
Add up hate  
And let it mount

One step forward  
Two steps back  
Will soon be over:  
Hear it crack!

The wheels may whirr  
A roundabout  
And neighbor's shuffle  
Drown your shout

The wheel must limp  
Till it hangs still  
And crumpled men  
Pour down the hill.

Day and night  
Night and day--  
Till life is turned  
The other way!

1935.

*LORCA*

*For Federico Garcia Lorca, Spanish poet, shot by  
Franco's men*

WHEN veins congeal  
And gesture is confounded  
When pucker frowns no more  
And voice's door  
Is shut forever

On such a night  
My bed will shrink  
To single size  
Sheets go cold  
The heart hammer  
With life-loud clamor  
While someone covers up the eyes.

Ears are given  
To hear the silence driven in  
Nailed down.  
And we descend now down from heaven  
Into earth's mold, down.

*While you—  
You hold the light  
Unbroken.*

When you lived  
Day shone from your face:  
Now the sun rays search  
And find no answering torch.

*Lorca*

If you were living now  
This cliffside tree  
And its embracing bough  
Would speak to me.

If you were speaking now  
The waves below  
Would be the organ stops  
For breath to blow.

And if your rigid head  
Flung back its hair  
Gulls in a sickle flight  
Would circle there.

*You make the flight  
Unbroken.*

You are alive!  
O grass flash emerald sight  
Dash of dog for ball  
And skipping rope's bright blink  
Lashing the light!

High in cloud  
The sunset fruits are basketed  
And fountains curl their plumes  
On statue stone.  
In secret thicket mold  
Lovers defend their hold,  
Old couples hearing whisperings  
Touch in a handclasp, quivering.

*Lorca*

For you sang out aloud  
Arching the silent wood  
To stretch itself, tiptoe,  
Above the crowd . . .

*You hold the word  
Unspoken.*

You breathe. You be.  
Bare, stripped light  
Time's fragment flagged  
Against the dark.

You dance. Explode  
Unchallenged through the door  
As bullets burst  
Long deaths ago, your breast.

And song outsoars  
The bomber's range  
Serene with wind—  
Manœuvred cloud.

*Light flight and word  
The unassailed, the token!*

1939.

*PRELUDER FOR SPRING*

THESE dreams abound:  
Foot's leap to shore  
Above the sound  
Of river's roar—  
Disabled door  
Banged and barricaded.  
Then on, on  
Furrow, fawn  
Through wall and wood  
So fast no daring could  
Tear off the hood  
Unmask the soul pursued.

Slash underbrush  
Tear bough and branch  
Seek cover, rabbits' burrow—  
Hush!

He comes. Insistent, sure  
Proud prowler, this pursuer comes  
Noiseless, no wind-stir  
No leaf-turn over;  
Together quiet creeps on twig,  
Hush hovers in his hands.

How loud heart's thump—  
Persistent pump  
Sucks down, down sap  
Then up in surge  
(Axe striking stump).

*Prelude for Spring*

How breezy breath—  
Too strong a wind  
Scatters a stir  
Where feathers are,  
Bustles a bough.

How blind two eyes  
Shuttling to-fro  
Not weaving light  
Nor sight . . .  
In darkness flow.

(Only the self is loud;  
World's whisperless.)

Dive down then, scuttle under:  
Run, fearless of feet's thunder.  
Somehow, the road rolls back in mist  
Here is the meadow where we kissed  
And here the horses, galloping  
We rode upon in spring . . .

O beat of air, wing beat  
Scatter of rain, sleet,  
Resisting leaves,  
Retarding feet

And drip of rain, leaf drip  
Sting on cheek and lip  
Tearing pores  
With lash of whip

*Prelude for Spring*

And hoof's away, heart's hoof  
Down greening lanes, with roof  
Of cherry blow  
And apple puff—

O green wet, sun lit  
Soaked earth's glitter!  
Down mouth, to munch  
*Up hoof, to canter*

Through willow lanes  
A gold-shaft shower,  
*Embracing elms*  
That lack leaf-lustre

And copse' cool bed  
All lavendered  
With scentless, sweet  
Hepatica—

Till side by side  
In fields' brown furrow  
Swaethe sunlight over  
Every shadow!

But still  
On heart's high hill  
And summit of  
A day's delight

*Prelude for Spring*

Still will he swoop  
From heaven's height  
Soaring unspent,  
Still will he stoop to brush  
Wing tip on hair,  
Fan mind with fear.

And now the chill  
Raw sun  
Goes greener still—  
The sky  
Cracks like an icicle:

Frozen, foot-locked  
Heart choked and chafed  
Wing-battered and unsafe,  
Grovel to ground!  
A cry  
Lashes the sky—

These dreams abound..

1939.

*SERENADE FOR STRINGS*

*For Peter*

I

At nine from behind the door  
The tap tapping  
Is furtive, insistent:  
Recurrent, imperative  
The I AM crying  
Exhorting, compelling.

At eleven louder!  
Wilderness shaking  
Boulders uprolling  
Mountains creating

And deep in the cavern  
No longer the hammer  
Faintly insistent  
No longer the pickaxe  
Desperate to save us  
But minute by minute  
The terrible knocking  
God at the threshold!  
Knocking down darkness  
Battering daylight.

*Serenade for Strings*

II

*O green field  
O sun soaked  
On lavish emerald  
Blade and sharp bud piercing  
O green field  
Cover and possess me  
Shield me in brightness now  
From the knocking  
The terrible knocking. . . .*

III

Again . . . Again . . . O again.  
Midnight. A new day.  
Day of days  
Night of nights  
Lord of lords.

Good Lord deliver us  
Deliver us of the new lord  
Too proud for prison  
Too urgent for the grave . . .  
Deliver us, deliver us.

*O God the knocking  
The knocking attacking  
No breath to fight it  
No thought to bridge it  
Bare body wracked and writhing  
Hammered and hollowed  
To airless heaving.*

*Serenade for Strings*

IV

The clock now. Morning.  
Morning come creeping  
Scrublady slishing  
And sloshing the waxway  
And crying O world  
Come clean  
Clean for the newborn  
The sun soon rising . . .

Rising and soaring  
On into high gear . . .  
Sudden knowledge!  
Easy speedway  
Open country  
Hills low-flying  
Birds up-brooding  
Clouds caressing  
A burning noon-day . . .

Now double wing-beat  
Breasting body  
Till cloudways open  
Heaven trembles:  
And blinding  
searing  
terrifying  
cry!

The final bolt has fallen.  
The firmament is riven.

*Serenade for Strings*

V

*Now it is done.  
Relax. Release.  
And here, behold your handiwork:  
Behold—a man!*

*1941.*

*FIVE POEMS*

*For Marcia*

I

IN the dream was no kiss  
No banners were upshaken  
The sure, unsevered bonds of bliss  
Were the hands untaken

In the dream no faltering  
Grew between your tree and mine  
Wind silenced us and sun embraced  
We seized no outward sign

In the dream all burden fell  
Sheer away; bare breathing left—  
Bare eyes and light-cleft minds were formed  
And found, never to be bereft.

It was the dream I saw again  
Meeting your person in the room  
The dream, electrified; since, I am free:  
Bird funneling night flight alone.

II

Your face is new; strange;  
Yet infinitely known  
Loved in some century  
Grass swept, tree sown.

*Five Poems*

I memorize  
The lineaments, so lean  
Steel bird prey intent  
Flight imminent

I see your stride (no walk)  
Cleaving the air,  
Cloud treading, your hair  
Sickle bent.

O early, early  
Before dawn whispers  
Before day fingers  
The faulty doorway

Early in the late  
Moon-tossed night  
Your face a flash  
Foreruns the light.

III

Early I lifted the oars of day  
Sped over silent water  
Early the wings of gulls found shadow  
Sky's face flashing, mirrored.

Early morning is heart alone  
No man shouting, no one  
No planes soaring, death destroying  
No shattered street a ruin.

*Five Poems*

Early is barely reachable  
Soars beyond our knowing:  
We are late sleepers, drugged in dark  
Aliens all, to morning . . .

IV

Night's soft armor welds me into thought  
Pliant and all engaging; warm dark,  
No scintillations to distract  
Nor any restless ray, moon-shot.  
I am still of all but breathing—  
No throbbing eye, no pulse; and a hushed heart.

. . . . .  
Sometimes at rest, the bones assume  
World's weight, hold us dumb  
We cannot lift a finger, flick  
An eyelash, wag a tongue:  
Breath is the only fluctuation in  
Death's posture, stoney, dumb.

Then is all sound fled  
Flown from the fluted ear  
Wind in the heavy head  
Can find no corridor

And then is sight so bound  
Lids petrified to earth  
Only one light is found—  
Imagination's going forth!

*Five Poems*

Only the heaven sent  
Pulse of the universe  
Beats through the buried heart  
Its steady course.

V

Your words beat out in space—  
Distant drums under the hum of day  
Only the hunter hurries for  
Only the parched heart hears.

Look, it takes long to grow a listener  
To bend his bough, let fall his leaf to earth;  
Upward and on his own words speeding  
Leaps the self to light.

But wind is teacher. Rain is kind  
Down-sailing, soaking deep  
And summer ruddying to sear  
Reiterates the drift:

Be earthward bound; and here  
In the strata of flown flowers  
And skeleton of leaf, set self down  
Hurry ear to ground.

Not burials; not dust and ashes' crumbs  
But world's own cry resounding!  
The spacious, the distant, army of your answer  
The fast approaching drums.

*FANTASIA*

*For Helena Coleman*

AND I have learned how diving's done  
How breathing air, cool wafted trees  
Clouds massed above the man-made tower  
How these  
Can live no more in eye and ear:  
And mind be dumb  
To all save Undine and her comb.

Imagination's underworld! where child goes down  
Light as a feather. Water pressure  
Hardly holds him, diving's easy  
As the flight of bird in air  
Or bomber drumming to his lair.

Child goes down, and laughingly  
(He's not wanted yet, you see)  
Catches fishes in his hand  
Burrows toe in sifting sand  
Seizes all the weeds about  
To make a small sub-rosa boat

Then up he bobs, as easily  
As any blown balloon  
To greet the bosky, brooding sky  
And hunger for the sun.

*Fantasia*

And child grown taller, clothed in man's  
Long limbs, and shaggy hair, his chin outthrust  
Searches for years the rounded world  
Climbs to its peaks, falls to its valleys green  
Striding the trim and trailing towns  
Fingering the fond arteries  
Possessing things, and casting them  
Cloakwise to earth for sleeping time . . .

Sometime the lust wanderer  
Will sleep, will pause; will dream of plunging deep  
Below it all, where he will need  
No clock companion, thorn in flesh, no contact man  
To urge him from the ground.  
For flying's easy, if you do it diving  
And diving is the self unmoored  
Ranging and roving—man alone.

. . .  
And I have learned how diving's done  
Wherfore the many, many  
Chose the watery stair  
Down, down Virginia  
With your fêted hair  
Following after Shelley  
Or wordcarvers I knew  
(Bouchette; and Raymond, you)—  
Here is the fascination  
Of the salty stare:  
And death is here.  
Death courteous and calm, glass-smooth  
His argument so suave, so water-worn  
A weighted stone.

*Fantasia*

And death's deliberation, his  
Most certain waiting-room  
His patience with the patient, who will be  
His for infinity . . .

So no astounded peerers  
On the surface craft  
No dragging nets, no cranes  
No gnarled and toughened rope  
Not any prayer nor pulley man-devised  
Will shake the undersea  
Or be  
More than a brief torpedo, children's arrow  
More than a gaudy top outspun  
Its schedule done . . .

Wise to have learned: how diving's done  
How breathing air, cool wasted trees  
Clouds massed above the man-made tower  
How these  
Can live no more in eye and ear:  
And mind be dumb  
To all save Undine and her comb . . .

1942.

## *WEST COAST*

### PRELUDE

THIS hour: and we have seen a shabby town change face  
And sandy soil be ripped of evergreen  
And broom, born yellow into golden May  
Scrapped farther up Grouse Mountain. We, who lay  
In roses and green shade under the cherry tree  
We too were rooted up, set loose to beg  
Or borrow a new roof, accept a poorer view.  
The tide had turned. That early gull adrift  
On empty inlet, keel to sun, he was outrun  
By humming plane, the flying boat on trial;  
And pleasure schooner skirting the dark shore  
Was soon nosed into harbor; for the grey gaunt giants,  
Hunters of skyline, convoy cruisers, they  
Jostled the bay.

We saw the shoreline ripped  
And boxes set in tidy rows, a habitation for  
A thousand children swept from farin and mine  
Drawn to the hungry suction of the sea;  
And saw the sunny slip where ferries sauntered in  
Easing their stragglers into a sleepy street  
Suddenly ablaze! And walls reared up, ship high,  
Grim curtain for machine-gun rat-tat-tat  
As caulkers set to work and welders steered  
The starry shrapnel on a new laid keel.  
Where two or three had come, travellers to be met  
Or mountain hikers holidaying high,  
Now in a herd of thundering hard heels  
Men surged for shop and ways, ten thousand strong  
And bent for business, eager to belong.

High on our hill we watched, and saw  
Morning become high noon, and the tide full.

*West Coast*

I

He who knew heaven is coming down the mountain  
Is stirred with wonder; curious, even he—  
Who sat with Horace at Soracte's heels  
Lulled to the murmur of Virgillian bees,  
Who bent eyes bookward in his earliest days  
Sucking sunlight from a world of words  
Dreaming to be word-welder, builder of these.  
Till rain swept on him, lacerating lines  
Of woeful time; till sunlight burned hot steel  
Into his shapeless heart, stoning it down  
To hard defending, harder thought—  
Then up, and words away, and books stamped under  
Up to the gravelled trail, the crags far yonder  
Feet firm on promontory, cloud-encircled:  
Where sun and rain blazed bliss on him  
Night chasing day on snow-spilt mountain rim.

He who knew heaven stands among us, watching  
His hand unfitted to this hammer-hold,  
His heart not conscious of the anvil beat,  
No visor for his eyes. Now he  
Makes ships? For carrying love in hold,  
Ah yes, for salting down old wisdom into kegs  
For other hands to welcome—yes and yes!  
But ships for men to fight upon  
Ships to right the wrong upon?—  
He hardly knows; he hesitates.

*West Coast*

And all about men flatten out the steel  
With hammer beat, beat hammer, hammer beat  
Shape it with sweat and muscle, shaped to fit  
The nozzle of a ship, a new sea-bird.  
And all about the masked men strike the torch  
Shaping the sides of ships with plate on plate  
Riveting bolts with sea-resistant spark.  
The hum, the drive of it!  
The roar, the strive of it!  
Each single soul to his own labor bent  
Yet welded to his neighbor, for the toil  
Fits all together in an endless chart,  
The pattern-makers moving on  
From ship to ship, galley to hold,  
Until a new keel's laid, another scaffolding,  
Till fire and sweat, muscle and oath and jest  
Mingle to launch her down the vaulted ways—  
A pearl-grey daughter leashed against the quays.

And why? What heaven-sent wanderer  
Can see the ant-hill swarm and be at ease  
Carrying his load of tools or wheeling truck  
Slinging steel rods onto a derrick train?

He watched a day or so; waited his time  
Stood in blacksmith's doorway where the furnaces  
Bellied and glared, vomiting molten steel  
Till the great moulder caught and shouldered it  
Machine's male hands on feminine soft flesh  
Creating features, fittings for a bride  
A child of ocean still at berth, unscarred.

*West Coast*

Challenged, mind moved, but not to the blood warmed  
Excitement seething in nerve's crevices  
The ship, he saw, a symbol of conception  
A giant scheme rearing to sky fruition:  
But yet he stood without; a stranger still,  
One hesitant to knock.

II

So morning found him, morning's gossamer  
Pearling the water, silvering the ships.  
On morning shift, when sky and water melt  
When men and women pour, with swinging pails  
From ferry slip,  
Pass through the gates, are billeted  
And move, alert, toward the long grey shape  
To find their home, their roof:  
On morning shift, song burst from below the decks.  
He bent his head, and heard, true as a bell  
Andalusian love song; high amidships  
Rumble of the rumba; in the hold  
A youngster jived; and girls at hand  
Trousered and kerchiefed, busy hammering  
Whistled clear the call to Coolins.  
Song! Song from the throat of morning bursting  
High above rivet, chipper, torch—  
Song from the heart of man at labor  
Welding his words into the ship's side.

*West Coast*

FIRST VOICE:

Who have through mountain wall  
Tunnelled to dank pits  
Where gas reeks, where weak light is life;  
Who have on mountain side  
Meagre as table bare, taken a wife  
Made children, reared a roof;

Who fought in strikes and met starvation  
Then back to pits again to face damnation  
The dust sticking in throat, the cough, collapse  
Then from the Sanitarium, down to sea  
The sea-coast air, and ships a-building there:  
Who breathe now, who find voice  
And sing with the throat bare.

SECOND VOICE:

Who have through hail and storm, through endless rain  
Cherished the crop, husbanded our flock.  
Have builded fences, reared high dykes  
Shifted the barn to upper ground  
And with the hay half harvested, seen cloud  
Crouch low again to pelt destruction down:  
Seen trees and fences, horses, calves and lambs  
Float helpless by, moaning their last faint cry—  
Who from despair and loss returned to city's arms  
And at the sea gate found a silver ship.

*West Coast*

THIRD VOICE:

Who have loved water, yearned for flood  
Watched woolly clouds puffed from the piping sky  
Who held the crumbling firmament in hand  
And knew no seeds could breathe, no green life flow;  
Who on the burnt spring grass cherished a crocus bloom  
Until we cursed it, for it bore no bread.

Who had no walls, no home  
No animals in barn  
Only the rusted implements  
Only the thistle, self-sown.

Who trekked bare-footed, underclothed  
Greedy for fruit in Okanagan fields,  
Thirsty for ocean even if salt it be:  
Who have paused here, on brink of life again,  
Build ships on quays, and bless the autumn rain.

FOURTH VOICE:

Who have been reared on rations and soup-kitchens  
And sent from school unlearned, clutching at work  
Out from the curling east to streaming west  
Riding the rods with hobos, drug fiends, college students  
And sleeping, at the country's end, in flophouse—  
A friend to jail, on easy terms with hunger.

*West Coast*

Who have lain low, known thin girls in an alley  
Kissed under a bridge and pillow'd on stone  
Who raised a fist to a window, blind with anger  
And demonstrated hate in the streets of the sleek:

Who have been thrown a bone and yapped at thrower  
Who looked this gift horse sharply in the mouth  
Who work, watching; who launch ships, wary  
Waiting the year's turn, living to see . . .

We too are here, bent over bench and caulk'er  
Our hearts awake; for now, our voices free:

III

He who with Horace at Soracte's heels  
Sat to the murmur of Virgillian bees:  
He who knew heaven saw the gateway open  
Heard the morning singing from the hold.  
He who knew heaven seized on rivet, hammer  
Ran to new keel laid on ways, to new life set  
Ready for use, ready to break or build.  
He who knew heaven found in men a singing  
Lifted his heart and welded his own song:

O man drift of the world  
This ferry is your fold  
Bearing you on to build  
Love in a ship's hold.

*West Coast*

Sprung from each land at war  
Squeezed through the open door  
Chinese boys who pour  
Sunflower seeds on floor

Hungarians and Greeks  
Sicilian lad who speaks  
The softest tongue; and flicks  
Eyes at the laughing Czechs—

And Paris French is heard  
Shot with the English word  
Watching a plumed white bird  
Whirl seaward.

And German speaks, and Pole  
And Ireland's growl  
Each on his own assembly line  
Attentive to his soul—

O man drift of the world  
Here at this port unfurled  
Each banner; and each song  
Blooms from a ship's hold!

*West Coast*

FINALE

High on our hill we watched, and saw  
Morning become high noon, and the tide full.  
Saw children chequered on the western beach  
And ferry boats plough back and forth, knocking the  
nose  
Of tugboats, barges, freighters, convoys, cruisers  
The harbor a great world of moving men  
Geared to their own salvation, taking heart.  
We watched gold sun wheel past the sombre park  
Slip beyond Lion's Gate, illuminate  
Cool purple skyline of the Island hills.  
And to the hulls and houses silence came  
Blinds down on tired eyes  
Dark drew its blanket over trees and streets  
Grey granaries and harbor lights; muffled the mountain-  
side.  
But still, far, far below those lights pierced sky  
And water: blue and violet, quick magenta flash  
From welder's torch; and still the shoreline roared  
Strumming the sea, drumming its rhythm hard  
Beating out strong against the ocean's song:  
The graveyard shift still hammering its way  
Towards an unknown world, straddling new day.

1943.

